

ACCESS AMERICA

One New York City Neighborhood Is a World of Religious Diversity

Flushing, New York, is home to more than 200 places of worship

New York -- The street blocks in Flushing, New York, may seem long to walk on a hot summer day, but they make the distance between the world's many religions seem short.

On one block alone, the Kissena Jewish Center faces a Hindu temple, Shree Swaminarayan Mandir, which neighbors the Boon Church of Overseas Chinese Mission, which faces the Singh Sabha Sikh gurudwara. This block exemplifies the rest of Flushing, a neighborhood 16 kilometers east of Manhattan that compacts more than 200 places of religious worship into 6.5 square kilometers. Flushing is a community in Queens, one of the

five boroughs that together make up New York City.

A short walk around the neighborhood takes a visitor past 151 Christian churches (many are Korean), 30 Buddhist temples, seven Hindu temples, six Jewish temples, four Muslim mosques, two Sikh gurudwaras, two Taoist temples and a group practicing Falun Gong, according to statistics compiled by R. Scott Hanson, visiting assistant professor of history at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

Local residents also proudly claim Flushing is the "birthplace of religious freedom in America" because of the Flushing Remonstrance, a petition by Flushing residents in 1657 asking the

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Dutch colonial government to uphold the religious freedom provisions of the town charter. It is recognized as the earliest political assertion of freedom of conscience and religion in New York.

Several factors came together over time to make Flushing one of the most religiously diverse communities in the United States. It is centrally located with two major New

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From the Ambassador

This issue of Access America throws the spotlight on religious freedom and diversity in America. For Americans, separation of church and state is a key principle that ensures religious freedom and diversity. Our commitment to religious freedom was first expressed in general terms in the Declaration of Independence and then more formally in the U.S. Constitution, which states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The Constitution's Bill of Rights expresses the view of our nation's founders that each person has the inalienable (or undeniable) right to make his or her own decision about religion. A key architect of the Constitution, James Madison, once wrote, "There is not a shadow of right on the general government to intermeddle with religion." Our strong views on the importance of separating church and state reflect our national experience. Many of the people who settled America were persecuted for their religious beliefs in their homelands. They were determined, when they came to America, that such persecution not happen again. Today, religious freedom and diversity are bedrock values for the American people.

—Robert F. Godec

From the IRC

Books

America, religions and religion.
Albanese, Catherine L.
(291.0973 ALB)

Interpreting the free exercise of religion: the Constitution and American pluralism.
Evans, Bette Novit.
(323.4420 EVA)

Religion and American cultures: an encyclopedia of tradition, diversity, and popular expressions.
(200.97303 REL)

Religion and the American experience: a social and cultural history, 1765-1997
Swift, Donald Charles.
(200.973 SWI)

Religious liberty in the Supreme Court: the cases that define the debate over church and state
Eastland, Terry.
(342.7308 REL)

Movies

Documentary films

Three faiths, one God: Judaism, Christianity, Islam.
(DOC 787)

This far by faith: Freedom, faith.
(DOC 184)

— Khaled Ben Bouzid
& the IRC team.

Become an IRC Member

The best way to take advantage of the Embassy's collection of feature films, books, journals, and other media is to become a member of the IRC. Bring one photo and one dinar to the IRC to get your membership card.

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York airports nearby, subway, bus and railroad stops, and major roads. International visitors came to the area for two major world fairs (1939-40 and 1964-65).

People wanted to get away from overcrowded Manhattan to find a little bit more space, grass and trees in the outer boroughs like Queens. Also, a loophole in the zoning law made it possible for many different immigrant groups to build so-called "community facilities," including houses of worship, in residential neighborhoods, Hanson noted. Converted houses and storefronts serve as churches and temples, scattered up and down blocks between larger places of prayer.

These conditions attract scores of immigrants to the area because they make it easier to establish faith-based community centers that bring some familiarity to a new, foreign home. Waves of Irish, Russians, Greeks, Italians and African Americans, over time, have shared space with and made way for Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Indian, Pakistani, Afghan, Mexican and

Central American residents, according to the New York Times.

According to the 2000 census, over half the residents of Flushing are Asian American. The town's main street "has the kind of business diversity, foot traffic, liveliness, and buzz Middle American main streets only dream of," says New York magazine.

Despite Flushing's capacity to provide a home for so many different groups of people, learning to live together has taken time because "people become more accustomed to diversity over time," Hanson said.

Although occasional incidents of vandalism and hate crimes have taken place over the years, and tempers flare over parking problems on weekends, diversity exists "without warfare and bloodshed," he said. People cannot connect any conflict to the past, which allows for a spirit of "live and let live."

This article is adapted from an article on America.gov, a web site delivering information about current U.S. foreign policy and about American life and culture produced by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Information Programs

Program Announcements

The Fulbright Visiting Scholars Program

To conduct research, lecture or pursue combined lecturing and research in the U.S.A.

Length of program: 3 to 10 months

Deadline: October 20, 2008

For more information contact Faouzia Ben Kheder at benkhedherf@state.gov or 71-107-438 or visit <http://www.cies.org/>

Foreign Language Teaching Assistant Program (FLTA)

An opportunity for young English language educators to refine their teaching skills and increase their English language proficiency and extend their knowledge of American culture and customs, while teaching Arabic at U.S. colleges and universities.

Length of program: One academic year

Deadline: November 21, 2008

For more information contact Sami Saaied, at saaieds@state.gov or at 71-107-259

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT**Ramzi Ben Nasr****English Access****Micro-scholarship****Home in Tunisia:**

Tunis

Home in the U.S.:

Washington DC, Philadelphia, at Pennsylvania University, and San Diego, CA

Fondest Memory of the U.S.

I loved having international friends and spending time with them. I also enjoyed studying in great institutions and learning about American people. I was even interviewed by a news reporter from Fox News in San Diego.

My experience:

Every day we had conversational and cultural classes, then went out to visit places. We visited a lot of different sites, including George Washington's house, a National Museum, Capitol Hill, IMAX Theater, and the San Diego Zoo. We even went on a boat for a river tour. We first stayed in Washington, D.C, then at Pennsylvania University, and we had classes there, and finally we were with a host family in San Diego, CA. We also had mentors who were American high school students. We participated in different cultural and social events with them, including family BBQs. And, the last day we had our graduation at a hotel in San Diego.

Lessons Learned:

I learned about U.S. culture and government. I also learned about the American way of life and how to interact with American people.

Advice for others:

Be open minded and study hard to get this wonderful opportunity.

What I miss most about the U.S.:

I miss my host family and my friends, especially my best friends Jeung Ho Piter, Dana and her mom.



Photo courtesy Ramzi Ben Nasr



Photo courtesy Ramzi Ben Nasr

**LIVE BLUES AND SOUL!****WHO: The Ron Smith Musical Band****WHAT: Blues & Soul****WHERE: At the Acropoleum!****WHEN: Wednesday evening, October 29**

For more information contact the American Cultural Center at 71-107-293

Why are Americans obsessed by National Football League?

by Ramzi Ben Nasr (Access Micro-Scholarship '08)



NFL football is among the most famous sports in the USA. Many people go regularly to stadiums to watch games, have fun, and make money too.

The regular days to go to the stadium are Saturday and Monday nights. I asked some people about the relationship between sports and money! Some said it was a bad relationship, because people spend a lot of money to go and watch games and bet. Making the right guesses allows them to win thousands of dollars.

But when I asked some other people, they had a different point of view on the relationship between NFL games and money. One of them said "I will spend any amount of money only to go and watch the game or meet one of my favorite team's players, if I am lucky. And if you are late and don't get your ticket, you will never find a seat or get in the stadium ... so you'd better hurry up!"

The NFL has positive and negative aspects. Like any other sport, NFL games can (sometimes) result in tension and fights between the fans of the different teams. One fan told me "if my team loses I will drink a lot of alcohol, then I will lose my mind and do bad things..." but that (rarely ever) happens.

For Americans, an NFL football game is not just a sport - it's a time to relax and break the everyday routine. Americans wait for the weekend to enjoy watching games. Apart from football, there are many other sports like baseball, golf, hockey and tennis.

Calendar

Study in the USA Consultations

Every Tuesday-Friday
AMIDEAST Advising Resource Library
8:30 AM-3:30 PM

Browse materials from U.S. universities ;consult resources on applications and scholarships.

Study in the USA General Advising

Every Wednesday & Friday
AMIDEAST Advising Resource Library
12:30 PM

**Please call or send an email to make an appointment **

Statement of Purpose Workshops

Graduate Statement of Purpose workshop
Undergraduate Statement of Purpose workshop

**Please Call or send an email to make an appointment **

Weekly Movies:

Fridays

American Corner at AMIDEAST
4:00 PM

October's theme: Elections.

Free English Conversation

Every Tuesday & Thursday
American Corner at AMIDEAST
4:00 PM

Weekly discussions on topics from films and music to religion. Topics are posted weekly in the American Corner and at AMIDEAST.

Open Access

Every Monday-Friday
American Corner at AMIDEAST
10:00 AM-6:00 PM

Peruse books and magazines in English on topics from history to pop culture and more.

American Corner at AMIDEAST
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